

## **COVID-19 Immunization Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador**

The development and implementation of a safe and effective COVID-19 immunization program is a key component to Newfoundland and Labrador's COVID-19 response. Through the immunization program, the number of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths will be reduced, allowing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to return to normal everyday life over time. However, the COVID-19 immunization program is the largest and most complex ever developed in this province and Canada.

The ultimate goal of Newfoundland and Labrador's COVID-19 immunization program is to immunize as many people as quickly as possible in an ethical and risk-stratified manner, while obtaining public confidence in the immunization program.

The public needs to have accurate and consistent information about COVID-19 vaccines to support them in making vaccination decisions. Misinformation about COVID-19 has been spread widely across the Internet and social media throughout the pandemic, making it difficult for public health officials to effectively communicate accurate and reliable information to the public. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is a trusted source for information on COVID-19 vaccines in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This website will be revised on a regular basis as more details become available about COVID-19 vaccines. Check back regularly for updates.

### **Get the Facts**

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine was approved by Health Canada on December 9, 2020 and the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine was approved by Health Canada on December 23, 2020. For information on the vaccine, please see the [Government of Canada's website](#).

### **How does the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine work?**

This vaccine tells your body's cells to make "spike proteins." The spike proteins are specific to the virus that causes COVID-19. Your immune system will respond to the spike proteins by making antibodies that will fight off infection. Your new antibodies will break down the spike proteins and get rid of them. These new antibodies will protect you from illness if you are exposed to the COVID-19 virus. The vaccine does not contain the virus and so it cannot give you COVID-19.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine has been tested in large clinical trials to ensure it has met safety standards, and has been licensed and approved by Health Canada.

### **How many doses of the vaccine are required?**

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine requires two doses of vaccine given 19-23 days apart and the Moderna vaccine requires two doses given one month apart. After receiving the two doses it may take another week to attain maximum protection against COVID-19.

### **What age groups are offered the vaccine?**

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can be given to those 16 years of age and older and the Moderna vaccine can be given to those 18 years of age and older. Given the limited supply of vaccine in early 2021, certain age groups will be prioritized. To determine your eligibility, please see [Priority Groups](#).

### **What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

Like any medication or supplement (including vitamins), vaccines can cause side effects and reactions.

After being vaccinated, it's common to have mild and harmless side effects. These can last a few hours or days after vaccination. Common side effects include:

#### **Pfizer-BioNTech**

- pain at injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle pain
- chills
- joint pain
- fever
- enlarged lymph nodes

#### **Moderna Vaccine**

- pain at injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle ache and stiffness
- chills

- joint pain
- fever
- enlarged lymph nodes
- swelling or redness at the injection site
- nausea and/or vomiting

If you experience any unusual side effects after receiving the vaccine it is important to contact your health care provider or local public health office.

### **Who should not receive the vaccine?**

Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to become pregnant should consult with their health care provider. If you are immunocompromised, have an autoimmune disorder, a bleeding disorder, and/or use blood thinner medication, you should also consult with your health care provider before getting vaccinated.

### **Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine**

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is **contraindicated** in individuals:

- with a history of anaphylaxis after previous administration of the vaccine
- with proven immediate or anaphylactic hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine or its container ([Product Monograph Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#))

If you have a fever, are sick with COVID-19 symptoms, or have received a vaccine in the past 14 days (including the flu shot), you need to delay your vaccination. Once your symptoms subside and it has been more than 14 days since your last vaccination, you can proceed with getting vaccinated.

### **Moderna Vaccine**

The Moderna vaccine is **contraindicated** in individuals:

- who are hypersensitive to the active ingredient or to any ingredients in the formulation ([Product Monograph for Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#)).

Consideration should be given to postponing immunization in persons with severe febrile illness or severe acute infection. Persons with moderate or severe acute illness should be vaccinated as soon as the acute illness has improved.

## Priority Groups

Vaccine doses for the whole population will not arrive at the same time. Vaccine supply is expected to be limited in the beginning of the COVID-19 immunization program. Therefore, a phased approach is required in administering vaccines, starting with those most at risk of exposure to COVID-19, those most likely to experience severe complications due to COVID-19 infection, and those essential to maintaining the provincial pandemic response.

### Phase One

The first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines has arrived, and shipments will continue through 2020 to 2021. These will include vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech, and Moderna.

In keeping with recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the initial supply of COVID-19 vaccine in Newfoundland and Labrador will be prioritized for the following groups:

- **Congregate living settings for seniors;**
- **Health care workers** at high risk of exposure to COVID-19, and those who are directly involved in the pandemic response;
- **Advanced age;** and
- **Adults in remote or isolated Indigenous communities.**

In Phase One, sequencing of the above groups will be dependent on logistics, including limitations on transportation, storage and handling requirements, and availability of vaccines. Every effort will be made to prioritize immunization for individuals in the priority groups, while preventing wastage. However, due to restrictive storage and handling requirements, there is a risk of dose wastage if excess doses remain after completing immunization in a particular setting. In the event that excess doses cannot be relocated, they may be provided to individuals in priority groups that will follow Phase One.

**Congregate living settings for seniors** includes all **residents, staff and essential visitors** at long-term care, personal care homes, community care homes, and assisted living facilities. Essential visitors are those considered, by the care team, to be paramount to the resident's physical care and mental well-being, including assistance with feeding, mobility, or personal care; communication assistance; and assistance with significant behavioural symptoms.

**Health care workers** includes all staff in acute care, long-term care, personal care homes, and community including home care workers. In Phase One, immunization will be prioritized for health care workers currently identified in the highest risk settings and those essential for ongoing COVID-19 response. This includes staff in the following settings:

1. COVID-19 testing and assessments;

2. Emergency departments and labour and delivery rooms (case rooms);
3. COVID-19 immunization programs;
4. COVID-19 units; and
5. Critical care units.

The sequencing of vaccination for health care workers may change as COVID-19 epidemiology and vaccine logistics in Newfoundland and Labrador evolve.

**Advanced age** includes those ages 85 years and above.

**Remote and/or isolated Indigenous communities** includes First Nations and Inuit communities in the province where infection could have disproportionate consequences due to limited health infrastructure and circumstances which make it challenging to practice physical distancing and other infection prevention and control measures. Remote describes a geographical area where a community is located over 350 kilometres from the nearest service centre having year-round road access in all weather conditions. Isolated means a geographical area that has scheduled flights and good telephone service, but is without year-round road access. Remote-isolated means a geographic area that has neither scheduled flights nor year-round access in all weather conditions, and minimal telephone and radio service.

At this time, vaccines will only be administered to adults ages 16 and over for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and adults ages 18 and over for the Moderna vaccine. Children and youth under the age of 16 will be eligible for immunization following additional international vaccine trials that demonstrate vaccine safety for that age group.

## **RATIONALE**

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the biggest risks for severe COVID-19 outbreaks are in congregate living settings for seniors (long-term care, personal care homes, community care homes, and assisted living facilities), in hospital settings, and remote or isolated Indigenous communities with limited health infrastructure.

While Newfoundland and Labrador has had a very limited number of cases in congregate living settings for seniors to date, we have seen across the country the impacts that outbreaks can have in these facilities, which can often result in mass fatalities. Furthermore, residents of these facilities are primarily of advanced age and often have conditions that put them at further risk of severe complications and death due to COVID-19. Residents, staff and essential visitors need to be prioritized in the initial supply of COVID-19 vaccines to prevent outbreaks and severe outcomes in these settings, and stress to the health system.

Health care workers are prioritized in order to maintain workforce stability, preserve health care capacity, and limit spread of COVID-19 infection in health care settings. The staff prioritized for vaccination in the initial vaccine allocation are those who are most likely to come into contact with an individual infected with COVID-19 and

transmit to high-risk individuals, or are essential to maintaining the provincial COVID-19 response, such as those administering COVID-19 testing and providing COVID-19 immunizations. Other health care workers will be prioritized as more vaccine supply becomes available.

Remote or isolated Indigenous communities, which includes First Nations and Inuit communities, may not have access to sufficient health care infrastructure in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19. While the remoteness of some Indigenous communities may offer a certain degree of protection from transmission of the virus, socioeconomic conditions such as overcrowding and chronic health conditions mean that an outbreak could be overwhelming. Newfoundland and Labrador has had no cases in remote or isolated Indigenous communities to date, and it is necessary to maintain this trend. Decisions regarding immunization in Indigenous communities will be made in partnership with Indigenous leaders.

## **Phase Two**

Additional priority groups will be identified for immunization once most of the individuals in the above groups have been immunized and additional vaccine supply becomes available. In keeping with recommendations from NACI, these could include:

- Health care workers not included in Phase One;
- Residents and staff of all other congregate living settings; and
- Essential workers.

These categories will be further defined as more is known about potential COVID-19 vaccines that will be available in Phase Two, including the number of doses, number and timelines of vaccines available, and storage and handling requirements.

## **Phase Three**

Once most individuals in high-risk priority groups have been immunized, the vaccine will be offered to the general public. It is anticipated that enough vaccines will be available to vaccinate everyone in Canada by fall 2021.

## Vaccine Administration

Initially, the COVID-19 immunization program will be delivered primarily by public health nurses with support from occupational health nurses for immunization of health care workers.

In the early stages of [Phase One](#), priority health care workers and staff at congregate living settings for seniors will be immunized first until redistribution is permitted. Other priority groups will be offered the vaccine once logistics allow.

Health care workers will be provided with information on how to get immunized through their regional health authority.

## Vaccine Safety

The development of COVID-19 vaccines is progressing very quickly for several reasons, including: advances in science and technology; international collaboration among scientists, health professionals, researchers, industry and governments; and, increased dedicated funding. However, any vaccines used in Canada must be approved by Health Canada through its rigorous regulatory process. The same review process is applied to all vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines will only be used in Newfoundland and Labrador if they are approved by Health Canada, and the evidence shows that they are safe, effective, of good quality and demonstrates that the benefits of using it outweighs the risks. For more information on Health Canada's review process for COVID-19 vaccines, please see the [Government of Canada's website](#).

Vaccines are constantly monitored after they are approved for safety and effectiveness. Pharmaceutical companies, health care providers and Health Canada are involved in this monitoring process. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada will take action if there are any problems with a vaccine. Vaccines are monitored in this way for as long as they are in use.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What COVID vaccines are currently available in Canada?

At this time, there are two vaccines available for use in Canada. Health Canada authorized Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine on December 9, 2020 and the Moderna vaccine on December 23, 2020. For more information on this vaccine, please visit the [Government of Canada's website](#).

### When will the COVID vaccine be available?

The first shipment of vaccines arrived in December 2020. Vaccine supply will be limited in the first quarter of 2021 and will be reserved for those identified in Newfoundland and Labrador's [priority groups](#). More people will be eligible for vaccination as more vaccine becomes available throughout 2021.

### Where will COVID vaccines be available?

Information on priority groups and locations to obtain vaccine will be updated as more details on vaccines become available. Please visit the [COVID vaccine website](#) for the most up to date information.

### Who will be able to get the COVID vaccine?

Since vaccine supply will be limited in the beginning of 2021, the provincial government will be [prioritizing who receives the vaccine first](#). It is expected that more vaccines will become available throughout 2021 and will be offered to all eligible candidates by summer 2021. Remember to follow the public health measures of physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, and staying at home if ill regardless of whether you have been vaccinated.

### Is the COVID vaccine safe?

COVID-19 vaccines will only be used in Newfoundland and Labrador if they are approved by Health Canada, and the evidence shows that they are safe, effective, of good quality and demonstrates that the benefits of using it outweighs the risks. For more information on Health Canada's review process for COVID-19 vaccines, please see the [Government of Canada's website](#).

### Will there be enough vaccine for everyone?

It will take some time and supply will be limited in the beginning of 2021. Not everyone will be vaccinated right away, but vaccination will continue throughout the year as more vaccines become available. It is anticipated that there will be enough vaccine to offer to all eligible people by summer 2021.



**Will I be able to choose which vaccine I receive?**

Vaccine supply will be limited at the beginning of 2021, so this may limit opportunities to choose which vaccine you receive. Vaccination is encouraged, but not mandatory. You do not have to be vaccinated if you do not want to.

**When someone is vaccinated, do they still have to wear a mask?**

Yes, it takes time to build an immune response and since everyone will not be getting vaccinated at the same time, we need to continue to protect each other by wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand washing and staying at home when ill.

**When will public health measures be lifted?**

The lifting of public health measures will be evidence-based and will depend on factors such as vaccination rates, efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines and the epidemiology of the disease in our province, country and world-wide. Public health measures, such as wearing a mask, physical distancing, handwashing and staying at home while ill should be followed by everyone until Public Health advises otherwise.